FILOZOFIA
Roč. 66, 2011, č. 1

SELF-RESPECT AND HONESTY

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MAURI, M.: Self-respect and Honesty
FILOZOFIA 66, 2011, No 1, p. 74

Self-esteem and self-respect refer to a way through which one relates to oneself, although they can be used as a synonymous expressions. On the basis of long tradition, since Kant ties self-respect to morality, all reference to self-respect has to be based on morality. Self-respect has a deeper root than self-esteem which is used to indicate a simple feeling of satisfaction with oneself without any value meaning. Self-respect is not a duty in itself but rather an acknowledgment of moral law which means the recognition of all moral duties. In Kantian ethics self-esteem comes from duty to treat oneself considering mankind in his person. From self-respect derive duties to oneself which are the foundation of duties to other people. Honesty has been understood as a commitment to find the truth and to live according to it. Honesty as a virtue means refusing any falsification of facts. Honesty is the most remarkable expression of self-respect and other-respect, without any concessions to self-deception or other-deception. The aim of the paper is to establish the differences between self-respect and self-esteem and to relate the two with the virtue of honesty.

Any attempt to write about respect for oneself must address the terminological question of its limits and of those expressions which, despite their proximity to what is generally understood by 'self-respect', are situated and used in a context other than that of moral philosophy. The different ways of considering the delimitation and application of this concept are well illustrated in the article by Stephen Massey[1], which sets out both the state of the question and the differences between the approaches taken by ethics and psychology to the concept of 'respect for oneself''.

1. Self-esteem and self-respect

Self-esteem and self-respect refer to a particular way in which a person relates to him or herself. Although they may be used as synonyms, an attempt will be made in what follows to establish the differences between them.

Taking as our basis the long tradition that, since Kant, has linked self-respect to human morality, any reference to respect for oneself must be founded upon morality. From this point of view, self-respect has deeper roots than self-esteem, the latter term referring to a feeling of satisfaction with who one is, which may remain superficial or indicate a degree of personal appreciation without touching upon the question of value. In a moral sense, respect for oneself is not related to the approval received from others, or to the reputation that results from an individual's behaviour. In the matter of self-esteem, however, the relationship of a person to himself does, at least partially, correspond to the way

in which this person has been treated by others, especially by those closest to him. Hence the insistence in children's education on correcting their mistakes whilst remembering to praise the good aspects of their behaviour, the aim being to ensure that each individual receives from others a self-image in which not everything is negative. From this point of view, self-esteem can be said to develop throughout childhood, whereas self-respect would be situated in the period of moral maturity. However, this distinction between self-esteem and self-respect does not mean they are unrelated, and it should not blind us to the fact that the latter is difficult to attain unless the former has a firm basis. Nevertheless, self-esteem may leave aside any interest in moral excellence.

From the Aristotelian point of view, the expression 'love thyself' may be used in two different ways. More commonly it refers to positive regard for oneself that excludes any other interest. The individual who procures as much pleasure as possible and shows no interest in the consequences that this desire may have for others can be said to love himself because he wishes to obtain certain goods, but the manner in which he relates to himself leaves aside any interest in moral excellence as it ignores the way in which goods are structured hierarchically, as well as the perfectible nature of personal being and the interest of and for other persons.

In its other, moral sense, loving thyself is equivalent to desiring for oneself all that which contributes to moral development, and this must include the personal relationship with others. Loving thyself means desiring for oneself that which is most noble in the hierarchy of goods and situations.

The description offered by Aristotle of the virtuous man reveals what loving thyself means in the moral sense of the term: "Therefore, the good man should be a lover of self (for he will both himself profit by doing noble acts, and will benefit aid his fellows)".[2] Love of self in the moral sense is the basic requirement for a correct relationship with others and one which is revealed in the various forms of friendship, whether this be based on pleasure, utility or character. In the first two of these, each of the two friends centres the relationship on his or her own interest, and sees the other merely as a source of satisfaction as regards the pleasure or utility that is felt to be needed. In contrast, friendship based on character places the emphasis and is founded on the moral character of those who regard themselves as friends. The appeal which a moral character holds for others is directly proportional to the depth and extent of its excellence. In this case we are considering the moral esteem in which a person holds himself to be an appealing feature of the moral personality that determines friendship based on character, and one which Aristotle regards as only possible in the case of characters built upon virtue.

The relationship between love of self and self-respect has been pointed out by Pauline Chazan, who also notes the limited interest shown by philosophers in determining the bases of this relationship. Although the moral significance of self-respect has been highlighted, the same cannot be said for the love of self. Chazan, however, argues that a loss in love of self is closely related to a loss of self-respect, insofar as the former "lowers one's confidence in oneself and in what one is by loosening the identification of one's

own self with those things which have been for one important, valuable and worthwhile" [3]. In these cases, the person feels that his acts are not the expression of his valued being. The fact that, at the same time, one also loses self-esteem and pride should not obscure the causal relationship between love of self and self-respect. Both have to do with the self considered as a unity, whereas self-esteem and pride refer to the evaluation of self made according to just one aspect.

Kant takes a different perspective on all this and makes a distinction between egoism or love of self and esteem [4]. Whereas egoism refers to well-being, esteem has to do with the internal worth of a thing. Therefore, argues Kant, the person who lets duty be his guide in life is worthy of esteem, whereas he who is sociable, for example, is worthy of being loved. This dual relationship also arises in the case of the relationship that a person has with himself: what is required is that one feels for oneself more esteem than love. Acting according to duty renders us worthy of esteem (although not necessarily worthy of being loved). In this way Kant makes reference to the fact that moral action is completely different from that which usually generates feelings (perhaps pathological ones) in those around us. Indeed, the person who acts morally does not always manage to convince others that his action is worthy of being loved (with pathological rather than moral feelings). Moral egoism consists in discovering that one person is more worthy of esteem than are others; yet the egoist's view is mistaken since it is not with respect to others that comparison must be made but rather with the moral law, this being what will give him the just measure of his worth.

As with respect toward anything other than the person himself, self-respect requires an attitude of understanding and acceptance. At the root of respect, and also at its starting point, one finds the well-known Greek phrase: 'know thyself'. It is from an understanding of personal reality — rooted in the natural, familial and social world — that the acceptance of the situation which defines each individual must be born. The acknowledgement that each person has the duty to respect him or herself is linked to the prior attitude of understanding and acceptance of one's reality. The acknowledgement of this first duty goes hand in hand with the series of duties that follow on from it.

Although some philosophers believe that one cannot speak of duties toward oneself because the individual does not have moral duties beyond his relationship to others, there are other thinkers who argue that the only moral duties are those which a person has with respect to himself. These two positions illustrate the two extremes of ethics defended by those philosophers who, while recognizing one's duties toward oneself as the starting point, also acknowledge duties towards other people.

Self-respect as a condition

In a person's determination to strive towards "working on" his moral character there has to be an appreciation of one's own self upon discovering that it has worth and is capable of acquiring a set of habits that lead to the formation of an excellent or virtuous moral character. Elizabeth Telfer [5] refers to the three conditions that are necessary to at-

tain self-respect: self-esteem, independence and self-control. It can be assumed that self-respect is born of the ability to make decisions and to exert a degree of control over circumstances. These two capacities can be regarded as necessary conditions for self-respect, and it is in this sense that we can understand what Telfer means when she says that self-respect is "a quality which is at least very useful in the moral life, providing very powerful incentives to virtue"[6]. In contrast, self-control, demonstrated through the acquisition of self-regarding virtues (which basically relate us to others), would be more closely associated with self-respect as an outcome.

Self-respect as an outcome

Understood as an outcome, self-respect can be thought of as the proud attitude of the individual who has been able to become a virtuous person. Here we would accept that Aristotle's description of the magnanimous man is that which pertains to the person who realizes his great worth due to the determined and constant effort exerted upon himself. More than justifying the pride felt in the character achieved we would have to state that the virtuous man, with the traits of the magnanimous individual, is someone who feels great respect for himself. Aristotle dedicates chapter three of Book IV of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to the magnanimous person, someone who is believed, rightly, to be worthy of recognition and honour. In fact, Aristotle situates the magnanimous person at an intermediate point, insofar as his self-knowledge accords with his true worth or merits. At the two extremes of this knowledge lie the vain person, who judges himself worthy of recognition that he does not in fact merit, and the pusillanimous person, who considers himself worthy of less than his actual worth. The most appropriate attitude, since it is based on a correct analysis of oneself, is that of the magnanimous person, who expects no more recognition than that which corresponds to his merits, and whose claims are consistent with the merits that adorn him. The dignity of the magnanimous person is the outcome of virtuous work upon oneself, and linked to this dignity there must be public recognition, i.e. honour. Magnanimity or greatness-of-soul is the condition reached through virtuous activity, and honour is the reward for virtue, whose possession is related with the morally good character. In the magnanimous person we find the description of the virtuous man who has become worthy of honour, but without honour itself being the motivation for his acts. The virtuous act is a noble one in which the virtuous person chooses the greatest good – whether his own or that of another – among those goods that are available within a given situation. This is why Aristotle says that magnanimity implies greatness. One can see that the description offered by the Greek philosopher of the magnanimous person differs greatly from the ideal of virtue maintained by the Christian tradition, however much that same tradition may have been based on Aristotelian texts, the difference being that humility, one of the virtues deemed implicit in the virtuous Christian, does not appear in Aristotle's description of the magnanimous person. The magnanimous person is a worthy man, worthy of honour, who feels toward himself a great respect that derives from a true knowledge of the characteristics of his own moral personality. The being of the virtuous man is illustrated when, in chapter four of Book IX, Aristotle offers us a

description in the following terms: the good man is of one mind with himself, he wishes goods to himself and achieves them in his actions, he takes pleasure in his own company, finds that his memories of what he has done are in agreement and has good expectation for the future, in sum, he is a friend to himself.

Kant, on the other hand, defines the elevation of regard as love of self and considers it too close to vanity and opposed to true humility, where this is understood as "the consciousness and feeling of the insignificance of one's moral worth in comparison with the *law*".[7]

The self-knowledge of the magnanimous person, which in Aristotle gives rise to having a precise sense of one's own worth, is, for Kant, the first commandment of all the duties towards oneself. Examining the rectitude of intention in order to see whether the source of actions is pure or impure requires of a person that he delve into his inner world. Self-knowledge is opposed to the self-esteem that is born of the love of self "that takes mere wishes for proof of a good heart". Reaching the heart of our moral worth or discovering that we lack it are duties that follow on from the duty of self-knowledge. However, and as Kant recognizes, the difficulty of deepening our knowledge of self derives from the human capacity for self-deception or the tendency to think that one has acted out of duty when, in fact, a behaviour has been driven by other influences. As Kant argues, we can never be certain as to the purity of our intentions. Kant's humble man does not attain the sense of security achieved by the magnanimous person in Aristotle; not even were their knowledge to be the same, and to be true, would the evaluation of the magnanimous person's attitude hold for Kant the moral prestige that it does for Aristotle. Furthermore, of course, the magnanimous person finds his benchmark in virtue and the comparison with others, whereas Kant's moral man compares himself with the pure moral law, and upon doing so, says Kant, he always finds reason for humiliation such that moral self-esteem can only arise from this comparison.

Self-respect and moral law

The tradition that makes respect one of the key elements as regards the relationship between rational beings and the moral law begins with the philosophy of Kant. Duty, defined as the need for an action through respect for the law, is linked with respect, which is understood as a moral feeling when faced with the representation of the law. Respect is a peculiar feeling that arises from consideration of the law within the person; therefore, says Kant,[8] one cannot say that man has the duty to respect himself, because in order to conceive of duty he must have in himself respect for the law. Self-respect, therefore, is not a duty but, rather, the prior acknowledgement of the moral law in the subject that implies the acknowledgement of all duties. Human beings, considered in their rational dimension, form part of the kingdom of ends in which all rational beings are linked through the same respect for the same law. The universalization of the maxim that guides behaviour means that the will of all rational beings is present within each individual decision; respect for the law is extended to all those who form part of the kingdom of ends and to the person of the subject, who cannot act upon his will without regard to his place

in that kingdom. One of the formulations of the categorical imperative refers to the immorality entered into by the person who fails to treat himself as a legislating member of the community of rational beings. In Kantian ethics, self-respect derives from the obligation to treat one's own being in the awareness that it contains the representation of humanity as a whole. It is from self-respect that the duties an individual has to himself are derived, duties that constitute the basis of duties towards others. Considered as a rational being, man has an absolute internal worth — wherein lies his dignity — that demands of others and himself a treatment according to ends. Respect is the attitude that all persons deserve from others, and which they themselves must show to others: "Man as a moral being (*homo noumenon*) cannot use himself as a natural being (*homo phaenomenon*), as a mere means..."[9] The co-existence of the animal dimension, in which man is heteronomous, and the rational, which is the realm of autonomy, must not lead to a situation in which dignity is lost and man is reduced to servility. Consciousness of personal dignity leads man to the moral self-esteem that is his duty toward himself.

Honesty

It is far from easy to define a virtue like honesty, since philosophers have ascribed to it such a varied content, and we must therefore start by establishing its limits and defining its essence.

One common feature of all references to honesty is to understand it as a virtue, in other words, as a character trait developed over time by one's own will. As occurs with the other virtues we can state that nobody is born honest or comes to be so by violating some aspect of his or her being. Persons become honest on the basis of a proposition that is put into practice over a long period of time.

From among the different definitions given by philosophers of the virtue of honesty two positions can be established:

a) The virtue of honesty understood as the commitment to seek the truth and live in accordance with it.

b) The virtue of honesty understood as being contrary to the falsification of the facts.

Without treating these two points of view on honesty as mutually exclusive it can be argued that whereas the former appears to cover all aspects of human life the latter is decidedly closer to the virtue of sincerity and refers more specifically to the facet of human relationships whereby things are communicated to others just as these things have been observed and known.

Honesty conceived of as the awareness of that which is appropriate for personal behaviour and relationships with others becomes the virtue that one must assume in all behaviour that which is just, bold, brave and prudent. The inter-relationship between the cardinal virtues and honesty has perhaps not been sufficiently emphasized, yet it is clear to see: we call honest the person who possesses the four cardinal virtues. In fact, the defence made by classical thought of the virtues can only be maintained by affirming that

the honest man only becomes so through possession of the cardinal virtues, since this honest quality can only come about by cultivating these basic virtues. Perhaps a distinction can be made between the virtue of honesty and the virtue of truth-seeking, but not with the commitment to live in accordance with the truth; after all, lived experience refers to behaviour, which is the terrain of virtue. For this reason, some authors regard honesty as the disposition to live in the light, a clear allusion to the true practical knowledge that is transferred to the terrain of praxis. In this regard, a lack of honesty would not imply erroneous knowledge but, rather, knowledge that, while remaining true, is not transformed into pertinent acts.

Honesty is as necessary for everyday life as are the cardinal virtues, since the description of someone as 'honest' refers to the integrity of behaviour. We cannot state that a person is honest in some activities but not in others, for instance. To live honestly is to live in accordance with ideals of authenticity that are revealed through one's acts. Rosalind Hursthouse[10] asks what we would expect someone regarded as having the virtue of honesty to be like; commonly we think that they would be reliable in their behaviour, that they wouldn't steal or lie, and that they wouldn't pretend to be more knowledgeable than they really are. In everyday language we say of someone that you know where you stand with him or her, that there are no hidden surprises or ulterior motives. James Tayper Pace, the character in Iris Murdoch's novel *The Bell*, is an honourable man who lives as he thinks, who thinks in accordance with the principles of his religion and who says what he really thinks. In his life this character is surrounded by people who find it difficult to remain honest because, for one reason or another, what they do falls far short of what they feel or think. Here we might recall Aristotle's distinction between the akratic and the enkratic man (i.e. a person who maintains through the force of will a desire that is contrary to reason), where he refers to the virtuous man as he who shows in his behaviour that internal accord which gives rational order to the desires in the service of good ends. Integrity is one of the characteristic features of the honest man because one finds no contradictions in him, nor in his acts, his thought or in the words he addresses to others or himself.

Virtuous, honest and man are thus different words that indicate a single reality. As St. Thomas puts it in Article 1 of q. 145, a thing may be said to be honest through being worthy of honour and honour is due to excellence, in other words, to virtue: "(...) properly speaking, honesty refers to the same thing as virtue".

In a slightly more restrictive sense, honesty is understood as the virtue of rejecting the falsification of real facts in our dealings with others. Several questions arise from this point of view: for instance, whether being honest is compatible with white lies, or whether the virtue of honesty obliges us to communicate all our most intimate thoughts and feelings to those we love. Honesty defined as the virtue of telling the truth challenges, to an extent, what we have stated so far as regards honesty and leads us to consider – as does Solomon – that truth and honesty are never absolute and, in certain cases, honesty may not even be a virtue. Thus, telling the truth when this is done in order to manipulate or to

cause harm cannot be understood as an honourable act. As Aristotle says, the ends of our acts specify them in moral terms; other authors, in contrast, make the appropriateness of telling the truth depend on the consequences that will follow from doing so. However, Solomon's argument is that if every act of telling the truth is considered to be honourable then this paves the way to condone cruel behaviour and irresponsible criticism: "The strict absolutist position would be that one still ought to tell, if there's anything to tell. The consequentialist would say that of course one should not tell, since no good could possibly come of it".[11] And against any moral decision that does not take into consideration elements other than the moral law, Solomon concludes: "(...) if both of us were totally honest, there could not possibly be any relationship at all, if for no other reason than because we would continually bore or offend each other past the limits of endurance".[12]

Telling the truth also has to do with reality and our capacity to relate to this. Saying something which is not the case not only reveals a lack of respect toward others, who we then use according to our own needs, but also indicates that we ascribe to reality less ontological weight than it actually has. The nature of the facts and of language becomes perverted by the interests of whoever falsifies reality by means of the communicated word.

Honesty, properly understood, also begins with oneself. An interest in self-knowledge and the ability to analyse one's own behaviour are indicative of someone who wishes to be frank with him or herself. Clarity as regards limits, in what is sought, and avoiding self-complacency and self-deceit are the three hallmarks of the honest person. The iconographic image used by the artist to illustrate both prudence and truth (a woman looking at herself in the mirror) would also serve to represent honesty, where this entails delving into the meaning of life so as to infuse everyday life with a full awareness and knowledge of personal being. The action of the honest person is an action within the appropriate limits made conscious by the protagonist. The person driven by the masses, who follows the objectives set by external authorities, does not fit with the image of the honest person.

The echo of a person's honest treatment of himself can be heard in the honesty with which he treats others. This sincerity that defines the way in which the honest man treats himself is the same as that which presides over the relationship with others; and it is not merely a matter of sincerity but, rather, one of authenticity and coherence. Acting in accordance with one's most intimate convictions and the most basic principles is, in the words of Jacinto Choza,[13] the most significant aspect of the ethical attitude of authenticity. However, authenticity cannot be defined solely in terms of this coherence between what one thinks and what one does, for if the person who thinks is perverse then one would be grateful if that person were to be 'inauthentic'. Thus, honesty implies an authenticity in which a person's behaviour is consistent with a set of morally good convictions and principles.

Honesty is the most notable expression of self-respect and respect for others; it is the commitment to avoid falling into self-deceit or deceiving others to favour our own inte-

rests. The trust of others and recognition of the honest person's worth are the recompense for this virtue, even though it is not this recompense that motivates the virtuous man. Furthermore, and as Kant pointed out, expecting that such a recompense will accompany a virtuous act may entail waiting in vain and lead to disappointment. The honest person may not receive any more recompense than his own, that is, the satisfaction of knowing that he has acted according to the dictates of his integrity, despite knowing full well that in the name of this integrity (when sure but mistaken) any number of foolish deeds may have been committed. But we are not speaking of the virtue of honesty that always goes hand in hand with the virtue of prudence. People trust the honest person because he has come to deserve that others expect of him that his actions will be a true reflection of what he thinks and says.

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[3] *The Moral Self.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998, p. 145.
[4] *Kants Werke*: Akademie Textausgabe; Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1968-1970, 27, 2.1.
[5] Self-Respect; *Philosophical Quarterly*, 18(1968)71, pp. 114-121.
[6] Ibid., p. 121
[7] *Kants Werke*: Akademie Textausgabe; Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1968-1970, VI (*Metaphysik derSitten* 1, 2, 435.
[8] *Kants Werke*: Akademie Textausgabe; Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1968-1970, VI (*Metaphysik derSitten*, XII, 403.
[9] *Kants Werke*: Akademie Textausgabe; Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1968-1970, VI (*Metaphysik derSitten*, 1, 2, 430.
[10] *On Virtue Ethics*; OUP, 1999, p. 10.
[11] The Importance of Being Honest, in H. Halberstam, *Virtues and Values*; Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1988, p.111.
[12] Ibid., p. 113
[13] *La supresión del pudor*; Pamplona, EUNSA, 1980, p. 78

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